Press Release

For Immediate Release

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United States Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative Public Comment Period ends 31 October 2005

The Departments of Homeland Security and State formally submitted the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative proposal for public comment on September 1, 2005. To provide vital information to the general public, the Departments of Homeland Security and State are issuing an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) on the plan to the public and requesting input and/or comment on the suggested documents and possible alternative documents that can meet the statutory requirements. A more formal rulemaking will be issued later this year following review of those comments to implement the first phase of the initiative. This rulemaking will take into account comments received from the ANPRM as well as soliciting further comments on the rulemaking itself.

Those wishing to comment on the proposal may access the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal at **www.regulations.gov** and type **DOS-2005-0004-0001** into the "keyword" box.

Written comments must be submitted on or before October 31, 2005.

In the proposed implementation plan, the Initiative will be rolled out in phases, providing as much advance notice as possible to the affected public to enable them to meet the terms of the new guidelines. The proposed timeline will be as follows:

- The Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative will require all travelers, including U.S. citizens, to and from the Americas, the Caribbean, and Bermuda to have a passport or other accepted document that establishes the bearer's identity and nationality to enter or re-enter the United States. This is a change from prior travel requirements.

- The goal of this program is to strengthen border security and facilitate entry into the United States for U.S. citizens and legitimate foreign visitors.

In light of the new security efforts, the United States is requiring travelers to have a passport or other accepted document for entry into the United States.

- In the proposed implementation plan, which is subject to a period of initial public comment, the Initiative will be rolled out in phases, providing as much advance notice as possible to the affected public to enable them to meet the terms of the new guidelines. The proposed timeline will be as follows:

  - *December 31, 2006* – Requirement applied to all air and sea travel to or from Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Bermuda.

  - *December 31, 2007* – Requirement extended to land border crossings as well as air and sea travel.

As previously noted, the passport will be the document of choice for travel within the Western Hemisphere or re-entry. However, another document that we anticipate will be acceptable under the travel initiative is the Border Crossing Card, (BCC – or "laser visa"). Currently, the BCC serves in lieu of a passport and a visa for citizens of Mexico traveling to the U.S. from contiguous territory. Other documents that we are considering for acceptance under this initiative are the Customs and Border Protection Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection (SENTRI), NEXUS and Free and Secure Trade (FAST) program cards.

No currently existing documents other than the BCC, SENTRI, NEXUS or FAST cards are under active consideration as substitutes for the passport. However, DHS and State are reviewing new technological developments regarding options for secure travel documents. Acceptable documents must establish the citizenship and identity of the bearer, and include significant security features. Ultimately, all documents used for travel to the U.S. are expected to include biometrics that can be used to authenticate the document and verify identity.

For more information, visit www.travel.state.gov

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